

## [Essay from Woody Guthrie to Alan Lomax, ca. November 1940]

I never did go so far as to call myself a writer or to claim that I knew what I was a going to talk about when I commenced, but there are men that make a living by doing both, and I make my living by doing neither one. But you mentioned to me in a little talk that we had somewhere in a salloon that you was figuring on getting together some information about elections and that you wanted me to set down and think of all that I could about them and write it down and mail it in to you at the Library of American Handsprings which I am doing to date, whichever date this is. I am writing this on Christmas paper and I think all election speeches ought to be wrapped in gift boxes with a red and green string tied around them, and that a way we would be sure at least of a Christmas package whether there was anything in it or not. No, what I'm really doing here tonight is seeing if I write better on the brown butcher paper that I wrote you on last time or this flimsy tissue paper. I didn't buy nothing down at the butcher shop, but I bought a couple of bright coloerd shirts and got skinned pretty bad. I went out with twenty dollars and come back with two new shirts and a candidate for Congress at Large. She says she can change her name to Lydia Pinkham and get elected up in Maine. Well, the name's the maine thing. Only trouble is she says nobody up in there aint got enough money to be beat out of and she aint got no reputation in no other state, but I think she's badly mistaken, Lydia's pickture right today is on farm house walls than any other person except possibly Jesus Christ. Did I tell you about the pool they took to find out who was the most popular man in the world and Jesus Christ was first and will Rogers second? I'm glad that they didn't nail Rogers up. I see you and Nick or was it just Nick that wrote it into the dadgum script about me a buying them purty Mexican boots? Well they aint so pretty and I didn't like them for their looks, but the feller told me that he bought them down in old Mexico for forty dollars in American Gold and that they was hand made and that he'd sell them to me for five bucks, and so I looked at the boots and asked him how long he'd wore them and he said that he'd raised

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two kids in them and they'd still bring up three more, and you know that's just how many I got. No, the boots aint pretty, and they dont claim to be read and green floweredy and all of that stuff — they're boots that's waded manure and got out and done things and that's what I like about them, and I dont think either one of my girls would wear them yet, but I got a boy that'll be eight year old in just seven more years, and by george, I bet he'll give them boots the dadgumdest tromping they ever had. You know I aint seen him in a long time. In fact I aint been around that guy much since he's been my boy. I have to set and study right real hard to think of a being a dad. But you know how it was — I had to leave — couldn't take them with me down the road — so then I couldn't make a living for them there in the dust country, so I just lit out, and am still lit out — but thank heaven I've learned a little bit, so the time wasn't plumb wasted. I have an idea that elections had something to do with this. I think that if I'd voted right I wouldn't of got so hungry and things would of been different. So let that be a lesson to you and every time a new baby arrives in your family that's just one more reason why you ought to really get down and figure these votes and election and candidates and hot air and wind bags out, and then decide which side you're on, and go down and vote the way that'll help every hard working man and woman in the whole dern country. The reason that I'm writing this big long letter is because I'm here tonight by myself and as you know if you know me very good, I like to set around and writ down stuff when I'm by myself, and so I'm by myself most all time, so I'm writing something most all time. Another thing is I like to see how these typewriters and election machines run. One's about like the other, a promise wrote down on one aint no good till you keep it and do what you say you'll do, and you can tell lots of lies on one or you can tell the truth, or you can write up stuff to say over the radio and you can make noises with your mouth and say just exactly nothing, or you can say something that will make it a little easier on folks back where everybody come from. Another thing is, you can write down a lot of nice things that you believe in on a machine like this, or go so far as to write it down with a pencil or founaten pen and even say it with your mouth, but if you dont really get out and do something about it you just blowed your top, you didn't do nothing worth doing. Anybody can set down and think up a lot of pretty things and all but that dont count no

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more than a sneeze in a cyclone. It's the same way tith voting. Most folks dont realize that your vote is about the best thing you got in the world because it is the best thing you can use to change the world and make it better. The trouble is that you just go down and vote and shoot your wad, and you do it this time just like you been a doing it all of your life and maybe that's just what's wrong with your life, unless you happen to be a living one of them lives that there aint nothing wrong with. Well there's a few little things wrong with mine and I'll keep a voting till I fix it — and if I dont fix it by a voting one way, I'll vote another way, and finally, I'll find out the right way, and then maybe somebody else will, and somebody else, until we'll have the right fellers a holding down them easy chairs, but not a taking it so dadgum easy. And when I say taking it I really mean a taking it. They been a taking it just as fast as you can rake and scrape and they can carry more out the front door with a fountain pen than you can carry in with a ten ton truck. Woody